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Procedures for consideration and approval of proposals for country programmes of cooperation

Summary

The present document contains proposals for the modification of current procedures, for the consideration and approval of country programmes of cooperation, which were adopted by the Executive Board in 1995 (E/ICEF/1995/9/Rev.1, decision 1995/8). The proposed changes aim to streamline and simplify existing procedures, thereby reducing duplication and workload, while maintaining a sound, country-based, results-oriented programming process under the leadership of national authorities. The changes will enable the preparation of UNICEF programmes of cooperation to be situated within the country goals and strategies of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and to continue to reflect national priorities for children.

The changes detailed in this document will ensure the harmonization of UNICEF programme preparation and approval procedures with those of other members of the United Nations Development Group in the context of United Nations reform. They will also continue to provide the Executive Board with a mechanism to provide comments and advice on draft programme proposals, which will be taken into account by programme countries and UNICEF in the finalization of country programmes of cooperation.

* E/ICEF/2002/2.

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I. Background

1. At its first regular session of 1995, the Executive Board adopted a two-phase procedure for considering and approving proposals for country programmes of cooperation (E/ICEF/1995/9/Rev.1, decision 1995/8). This involved the submission of a brief country note on programme strategies and priorities at the first regular session for the comments of the Board. This was followed by a final country programme document (the country programme recommendation) for approval on a no objection basis at the second regular session.

2. The ongoing implementation of that decision was reviewed by the Executive Board at its second regular session of 1998 (E/ICEF/1998/P/L.22 and E/ICEF/1998/6/Rev.1, decision 1998/16). The Board noted that, in future, changes to the approval process might result from: the overall implementation of United Nations reform; the introduction of new programming instruments, specifically the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF); and efforts to further economize and streamline UNICEF programming procedures and instruments.

3. Experience since 1998 in the harmonization of the programme cycles of agencies in the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), and in the formulation of CCAs and UNDAFs, has indicated the need for modification of the procedures for considering proposals for country programmes of cooperation which were adopted by the Executive Board in 1995. This need is reinforced by the calls for simplification and harmonization of United Nations rules and procedures by the United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, including with reference to programming processes.[1] These calls have been reiterated by the General Assembly at recent triennial comprehensive policy reviews.[2]

II. Modification of the country programme consideration and approval process by the Executive Board

A. Introduction

4. An internal review by the UNICEF secretariat of recent experience and ongoing consultations with partner agencies in UNDG has resulted in the proposals in the present document for modification of the programme consideration and approval process by the Executive Board. These proposals take into account the timing of the CCA and UNDAF, and reflect the need for these country-specific analytical and strategic framework documents to be in place prior to the detailed design of individual agency programmes of cooperation, as a basis for programme development.

5. The modifications proposed in this document are also designed to reduce the length of time and the workload for national authorities and UNICEF associated with the design of new programmes of cooperation, while at the same time

[1] See, inter alia, General Assembly resolutions 42/196, 44/211, 47/199, 50/120, 53/192 and Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/6, para. 12.

[2] The most recent General Assembly resolutions from these reviews are 53/192 and 56/201, from 1998 and 2001, respectively.

preserving and promoting a soundly based programming process. They will eliminate overlaps in phasing and reduce duplication among documents, which make the current process unnecessarily cumbersome. At the same time, they respond directly to the calls for harmonization and streamlining of programme preparation procedures among the UNDG agencies, and to the concerns of the new UNICEF medium-term strategic plan (MTSP) for the period 2002-2005 (E/ICEF/2001/13) for a greater strategic focus and results orientation of UNICEF cooperation.

B. Modified procedures for Executive Board consideration and approval of new country programmes

6. CCA and UNDAF provide the starting points and are integral steps in the development of proposals for UNICEF country programmes of cooperation. This is now reflected by the UNICEF secretariat in internal guidelines for field offices, including the core "Programme Policy and Procedure Manual: Programme Operations". Together with the UNICEF MTSP and national policies and priorities, particularly as they relate to the fulfilment of the rights of children and women, CCA and UNDAF provide the country-specific framework for the development, under the leadership of the Government, of proposals for new UNICEF programmes of cooperation.

7. As part of its ongoing contributions to national monitoring of children, UNICEF will continue to collaborate with and support national partners in undertaking detailed assessments and analyses of issues affecting children's and women's rights. The phasing and design of these situation analyses will be determined in each country on a flexible basis, and will be planned as a regular part of the country programme of cooperation. They will no longer comprise a formal step in the preparation of a new country programme. The results of these in-depth analyses of children and women will contribute to the wider country analyses undertaken for the CCA, which will form the first step in programme preparation. This will help to ensure the consideration of priority national issues for children in the CCA and subsequently in the UNDAF. Thus, UNDAF provides the broader country framework for the development of the UNICEF programme of cooperation, as well as for those of other United Nations agencies.

8. CCA and UNDAF are expected to be finalized in the penultimate year of the harmonized programme cycle. The development of the UNICEF country programme of cooperation will normally commence subsequent to the development of the UNDAF, which identifies the strategic goals and priorities for the work of the United Nations system in the country. Continuing current practice, the Government and UNICEF will hold a programme strategy meeting, involving other partners as appropriate, in order to define the more specific priorities, strategies and key areas of intervention for the UNICEF programme of cooperation.

9. The programme strategy meeting will be held early in the year preceding the start of a new programme cooperation cycle. It will provide the basis for determining the specific contributions of UNICEF to national efforts for fulfilling children's rights and the Millennium Development Goals within a series of collaborative relationships with national, United Nations and other development partners. It will take into account the goals of UNDAF itself, as well as national plans and priorities relating to children and women, including those reflected in

instruments such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and sector-wide approaches (SWAPs); the priorities of the MTSP as approved by the Executive Board; lessons learned from previous programmes of cooperation; the expected contributions by other cooperating partners to national efforts for children's and women's rights; and, where relevant, observations or recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child relating to national reports on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

10. Subsequent to the programme strategy meeting, a draft country note, including proposed funding allocations, will be prepared for consideration of the Executive Board at its annual session in the year prior to the commencement of the new country programme cycle. During the same period, the associated integrated budget and country programme management plan will also be prepared.

11. The format of the current country note will be modified and lengthened, to a range of 6-10 pages, of text, depending on the size and other characteristics of the proposed programme of cooperation. Compared to the current country note format, the new country note will provide the Executive Board with more details of the proposed strategies for cooperation and programme components. The country note will contain the following main elements:

(a) A summary of the situation of children and women, drawn from the in-depth UNICEF-supported analysis of children and women, and the wider CCA;

(b) A summary of key results and lessons learned from the current programme of cooperation;

(c) The aggregate programme budget for the forthcoming cooperation period, with an indicative breakdown by main programme components;

(d) The country programme goals and strategies, detailing the relationship with the UNDAF goals; national plans and priorities, including PRSPs and SWAPs where they exist; and the priorities and strategies of the UNICEF MTSP;

(e) An analysis of programme partnerships and the international cooperation context;

(f) An outline of each main programme component, including objectives and main areas of intervention to be supported;

(g) Programme management, monitoring and evaluation;

(h) A basic data table.

12. The Executive Board, which will provide comments to the secretariat on the draft country note at the annual session, will also be requested at this session to approve the proposed aggregate budget totals for regular resources and other resources.

13. Following discussion of the draft country notes at the annual session, the comments of the Executive Board will be conveyed to the respective Governments and UNICEF country representatives by the UNICEF regional directors. The country note and associated master plan of operations (MPO) for the forthcoming programme of cooperation will then be finalized by the respective Government and UNICEF, taking into account the comments provided by the Board. The revised country note will provide the basis for the text of the MPO. A country programme

results matrix will also be developed subsequent to the annual session as an annex to the revised country note and as part of the MPO. This will be used as an instrument for results-oriented management, monitoring and future adjustments, including at the mid-term review (MTR) of the programme of cooperation.

14. The revised country note, incorporating the results matrix, as well as any modifications to the text and any reallocations among the programme components within the approved aggregate programme budget, will be posted on the UNICEF Extranet in October.

15. The revised country notes will be approved on a no objection basis at the first regular session of the Executive Board in January of the first year of the new country programme, unless at least five Board members have informed the secretariat in writing within six weeks following the posting of a country note on the Extranet of their wish to further discuss the note for a particular country.

16. The modified procedure described above will be introduced for proposals for country programmes of cooperation being presented to the Executive Board in 2003.

III. Other considerations

17. In countries where no UNDAF is being undertaken, the CCA and/or the most recent situation analysis of children and women, together with the various policy and planning instruments indicated in paragraph 9 above, will provide the basis for the development of the country note for UNICEF cooperation.

18. Short-duration country programme cycles will continue to be avoided as much as possible, except where necessary to achieve or maintain harmonization of cycles among the United Nations agencies. Even in countries experiencing emergency situations, a medium-duration cycle will be adopted, wherever feasible, and programme partners will use the existing annual and mid-term reviews to make necessary adjustments to the programme focus. Significant changes in programme focus and expected key results as a consequence of these reviews will be reported to the Executive Board by the regional directors.

19. Programme proposals for countries that are expected to make a transition in status may, in some cases, be of short duration. They will be handled in the same way as regular country programme proposals. Existing Executive Board procedures for the consideration and approval of other forms of programme recommendations — including "stand-alone" proposals for programmes to be funded by other resources only, proposals for intercountry and interregional programmes, and proposals for additional regular resources for already-approved programmes — will remain in effect.

20. The procedures introduced in Executive Board decision 1995/8 for summary reports on the outcomes of MTRs and major evaluations of country programmes, including on the need for any adjustments in the originally approved programme of cooperation, will also continue on the basis of the arrangements currently in effect. To even the flow of documentation and associated work requirements, these reports will, from 2003, be presented to the Board at its second regular session.

IV. Harmonization of country programme preparation procedures among United Nations Development Group agencies

21. At its 2001 annual session, the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) adopted a decision on the UNDP/UNFPA programming process (2001/11). This, inter alia, determined that the draft country outlines would be reviewed by the Executive Board for discussion at their annual sessions and, where applicable, CCA and UNDAF would be made available for information. Following this, the agencies would assist Governments in finalizing the country programmes, taking into account comments made by the Board. These programmes would then be posted on the web sites of the respective agencies and approved on a no objection basis in January of the first year of the new country programme.

22. The proposals in this document for modification of the country programme consideration and approval procedures of the Executive Board are highly consistent with the above decision of the UNDP/UNFPA Board, and will bring about effective harmonization of the preparation and approval procedures of the respective agencies within the context of United Nations reform and, specifically, of CCA and UNDAF.

V. Draft decision

23. The Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board adopt the following draft decision:

The Executive Board,

Having reviewed the report on "Procedures for consideration and approval of proposals for country programmes of cooperation" (E/ICEF/2002/P/L.16),

Welcoming the continued efforts made by the United Nations Development Group towards further harmonization and streamlining of the cycles and preparation procedures for country programmes of cooperation,

Emphasizing that the programming process for UNICEF cooperation should continue to reflect national priorities and needs, under the primary responsibility of the national Government, and within the framework of the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan for the period 2002-2005 (E/ICEF/2001/13) and in consultation with other relevant agencies and partners, as appropriate;

1. *Decides* that:

(a) The draft country notes for UNICEF programmes of cooperation will be developed on the basis of national plans and priorities, and within the framework of the Common Country Assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework;

(b) The draft country notes will be 6-10 pages in length, depending on the size and other characteristics of the programme of cooperation, and will summarize the situation of children and women, the key results achieved and lessons learned from prior cooperation, while highlighting the main components of the proposed country programme, including objectives, strategies, main areas of assistance,

expected results, major partnerships, management and monitoring arrangements, and proposed budget;

(c) The draft country notes will be presented to the Executive Board for discussion and comment at the annual session prior to the commencement of the programme cycle, and for approval of the aggregate totals of estimated regular and other resources in the programme budget;

(d) The country notes will be revised by the respective Government and UNICEF following presentation to the Executive Board, taking into account comments made by the Board;

(e) The revised country notes, including a results matrix, will be posted by October of the last year of the country programme on the UNICEF Extranet and will be approved at the first regular Board session in January on a no objection basis, unless at least five members have informed the secretariat in writing, within six weeks of the posting of a country note, of their wish to bring the particular country programme before the Executive Board;

(f) The above modifications will take effect in 2003;

(g) From 2003, the outcomes of mid-term reviews and major evaluations of country programmes will be considered at the second regular session of the Executive Board;

(h) The current arrangements for the consideration of other forms of programme recommendations — including "stand-alone" proposals for programmes to be funded by other resources only, proposals for intercountry and interregional programmes, and proposals for additional regular resources for already-approved programmes — will remain in effect;

2. *Requests* the Executive Director to report to the Executive Board at its annual session in 2005 on progress and any issues arising from implementation of the present decision.